

Right in Their Own Eyes

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today.

A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we've become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word.

We're continuing our study in the book of Judges. In fact, we're coming near to the very end of it.

We just have a few Sundays left in this book, and you'll remember that the book of Judges is about a number of things.

It's about the need for constant renewal and revival among God's people. It's about the need for a faithful and true king, a king who can do what no human can do, which is to change the hearts of men.

[1 : 07] It's about the power of Spirit-filled leadership, and it's about God's mercy to hard-hearted people, people like you and me. Last week, we finished chapter 18, and in finishing that chapter, we finished the story of Micah.

You'll remember that his story did not end well. The people of Dan came, and they stole the idols that he had spent so much money and energy on. And not only did they steal his idols, they also hired away the Levite that he was so proud to have in his house.

And so we saw that in the end, idols can't save, they can't deliver, they can't protect. In the end, idols will always break your heart.

That was a story for Micah, the story for us as well, that the worship of the true God is the only safe worship. We turn now to Judges chapter 19, which continues the downward spiral that we've been in for some time.

And this chapter is arguably the most tragic, the most violent, the most gruesome story in the entire Bible. There are 66 chapters in the Bible, 39 in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament, and there are nearly 1,200 chapters in the Bible.

[2 : 35] And I would submit to you this morning that this chapter, of almost 1,200 chapters, is in fact the worst of all. And that's what we're told at the very end.

The last verse, verse 30 of chapter 19, says this, such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day.

And so as we come to what is a tragic and gruesome story, it's important to recognize that perhaps for many of us it may stir up all sorts of things inside of us.

Things that we've seen or experienced or heard about. And it may be difficult to listen to for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with the passage itself.

And so I just want to remind us as we come together, as maybe things are stirred up inside of you, that God is still with you in that moment. That His word is good.

[3 : 35] That we can trust that He'll use it. We can trust that His grace is enough. So we come now to a sober story that reminds us, shows us, warns us about what happens when everyone does what's right in their own eyes.

And so with that, I invite you to turn with me to Judges chapter 19. You can turn in your Bible, you can turn on your phone, you can turn in your worship guide.

No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that His word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes

straight from the honeycomb.

And so that's why we read now Judges chapter 19, starting in verse 1. In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.

And his concubine was unfaithful to him, and she went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there for some four months. Then her husband arose and went after her to speak kindly to her and bring her back.

[4 : 51] He had with him his servant and a couple of donkeys, and she brought him into her father's house. And when the girl's father saw him, he came with joy to meet him.

And his father-in-law, the girl's father, made him stay, and he remained with him three days. So they ate and drank and spent the night there. And on the fourth day, they arose early in the morning, and he prepared to go.

But the girl's father said to his son-in-law, Strengthen your heart with a morsel of bread, and after that, you may go. Verse 6. So the two of them sat and ate and drank together.

And the girl's father said to the man, Be pleased to spend the night and let your heart be merry. And when the man rose up to go, his father-in-law pressed him till he spent the night there again.

And on the fifth day, he arose early in the morning to depart. And the girl's father said, Strengthen your heart and wait until the day declines. So they ate both of them.

[5 : 56] And when the man and his concubine and his servant rose up to depart his father-in-law, the girl's father said to him, Behold, now the day has waned toward evening. Please spend the night.

Behold, the day draws to its close. Lodge here and let your heart be merry. And tomorrow you shall arise early in the morning for your journey and go home.

Verse 10. But the man would not spend the night. He rose up and departed and arrived opposite Jebus, that is Jerusalem. He had with him a couple of saddled donkeys and his concubine was with him.

When they were near Jebus, the day was nearly over and the servant said to his master, Come now, let us turn aside to the city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it.

And his master said to him, We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners who do not belong to the people of Israel, but we will pass on to Gibeah. And he said to his young man, Come and let us draw near to one of these places and spend the night at Gibeah or at Ramah.

[7 : 00] So they passed on and went on their way. And the sun went down on them near Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. And they turned aside there to go in and spend the night at Gibeah.

And he went in and sat down in the open square of the city for no one took them into his house to spend the night. Verse 16, And behold, an old man was coming from his work in the field at evening.

The man was from the hill country of Ephraim and he was sojourning in Gibeah. The men of the place were Benjaminites. And he lifted up his eyes and saw the traveler in the open square of the city.

And the old man said, Where are you going? And where do you come from? And he said to him, We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim from which I come.

I went to Bethlehem in Judah and I am going to the house of the Lord but no one has taken me into his house. We have straw and feed for our donkeys with bread and wine for me and your female servant and the young man with your servants.

[8 : 09] There is no lack of anything. And the old man said, Peace be to you. I will care for all your wants. Only do not spend the night in the square.

So he brought him into his house and gave the donkeys feed and they washed their feet and ate and drank. Verse 22. As they were making their hearts merry, behold the men of the city, worthless fellows, surrounded the house beating on the door and they said to the old man, the master of the house, bring out the man who came into your house that we may know him.

And the man, the master of the house went out to them and said to them, No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Since this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing.

Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out now. Now, violate them and do with them what seems good to you. But against this man do not do this outrageous

thing.

But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and made her go out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until the morning.

[9 : 23] And as the dawn began to break, they let her go. And as morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was until it was light.

Verse 27. And her master rose up in the morning and when he opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, behold, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house with her hands on the threshold.

He said to her, Get up, let us be going. But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey and the man rose up and went away to his home.

And when he entered his house, he took a knife and taking hold of his concubine, he divided her limb by limb into twelve pieces and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel.

And all who saw it said, Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day.

[10 : 25] Consider it, take counsel, and speak. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you that your word is good and good for us, that it's for our good and for your glory.

And we ask that you would help us this morning as we come to an especially challenging passage, that you remind us of your presence with us, you encourage us with your love for what's right and just, you'd use this passage to challenge us, to encourage us.

Most of all, you'd remind us of Jesus, that we would see him for who he is. We'd know his mercy and his grace and his love, that we would not do what's right in our own eyes, but that we would follow him and trust him as our king.

We ask these things in his mighty name. Amen. Amen. You may notice some similarities from last week as we start out once again with a story about a Levite, a different Levite than the one we saw in chapters 17 and 18.

And we find out immediately that this Levite takes a concubine to himself. In verse 2, we find out that the concubine, as we're told, is unfaithful to him.

[11 : 50] It's unclear, however, what exactly that means. It could mean that she was with another man. It could simply mean that she went away from him. That could be what it means for her to be unfaithful, that she left to go back to her father's house.

Regardless of what's happening, we see in verses 2 and 3, there's a time that elapsed of four months and then finally this man decides, hey, it's time for me to go and pursue this woman to bring her back so she's no longer at her father's house.

Then we counter this moment, verses 4 through 10, there is this arm-wrestling match between the husband, the Levite, and his father-in-law about how long exactly he's going to stay.

He's pressed over and over again just to stay another day, enjoy another meal with us. And I don't want you to miss the details here. In verse 4, we're told that this father-in-law has great joy that this Levite has finally come back to him.

We're not told how the concubine feels about the fact that he's come back. There's a deafening silence there. Verses 9 through 10 become significant because in all of this pressure and negotiation about how long he's going to stay at their house, when he finally has to draw a boundary and say, you know what, we have to move on, it doesn't happen until the evening.

[13 : 17] It is less than ideal that he's traveling at this time. It's going to end up putting him in a bad position later on. And so he and his gang, his troop, decide to move out.

It's time to continue towards their destination. And it makes sense for them, especially since it's so late in the day, to stop at this city of Jebus, which is going to later become the city of Jerusalem.

But the Levite says, look, I don't want to stay here. This is the land of foreigners. Let's go on a little bit further so that we can be with God's people.

Let's go to Gibeah or Ramah. Why? Well, the assumption here is that if they go and they stay with Israelites, they are going to receive the hospitality, the welcome, the safety that's not going to be available in a Canaanite city.

Of course, the Canaanites are crazy, right? That's where something bad might happen. Let's go to where it's safe. Let's travel just a little bit more so we can be with our own people.

[14 : 23] We can feel a little bit of a shiver here with him in verse 14. They're arriving at this city as the sun is going down. Again, there's a lack of wisdom here.

It's not strategic. The ideal situation would be for them to arrive when the sun is out, right? They're going to have plenty of time to settle themselves, find a place of safety, identify a good host. And it's here in the next verse that this story takes an ominous turn. He doesn't go to Jebus. That's where the Canaanites live. He goes to Gibeah.

That's where the Israelites are. And yet, he went in and sat down in the open square of the city for no one took them into his house to spend the night.

So we know something's off. This is not playing out the way that the Levite had planned. He tells the man who comes up later the same thing.

[15 : 30] Verse 18, no one has taken me into his house. And it's scandalous. It's not just scandalous that no one has taken him in. It's even worse than that. Verse 19, he says, look, we even brought our own food.

Why would someone not want to take them in? Well, maybe they're concerned about the expense, right? Maybe they're concerned, hey, we don't actually have the resources to take care of this guest. And yet, even that is not a legitimate objection.

No, we brought our own wine. We brought our own food. All we need is a safe place to stay. It's not going to cost you anything.

And yet, there they are. They're trapped in the square of the city. Thankfully, this old man from the hill country of Ephraim is sojourning. He comes along and he says, look, you can stay with me.

And here we hit another ominous warning. Verse 20, whatever you do, don't stay in the square. You may have thought you were in friendly territory.

[16 : 35] Nothing could be further from the case, the truth. You may have thought that you were being wise by staying away from the Canaanites, but in fact, you have walked into another dangerous situation.

What begins as a couple ominous warnings turns into complete disaster for these travelers. In verses 22 and 23, these worthless men come and what they want to do is to violate this Levite who has come to visit.

And instead, there's this offer made. Hey, let's compromise, guys. Verse 24, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine. How about we leave the Levite alone? You can take them instead.

And don't miss the irony that's going on here. As their offer, they act as if this is completely normal. Verse 23, you know, we don't want you to be wicked. Don't do this vile thing.

Verse 24, don't do this outrageous thing. Let's not do something crazy, right? Don't take the leap. Let's do something totally normal, okay? How about you just take the concubine of my daughter instead?

[17 : 43] Like, that will be a reasonable thing for you to do. And this is meant to remind us just like how ridiculous things have become in Israel. It sounds like they're not willing to compromise and so the Levite decides to take action into his own hands.

You guys won't make a deal with me? Well, I'm just going to shove my concubine out the door. She can be with you. We're going to be safe inside. We'll figure this out later.

What happens later needs no explanation outside of the verses themselves. Verse 25, they knew her and abused her all night until the morning. Verse 27, she staggers back with her hands on the threshold.

So close, so far. You might think at this point that things couldn't get worse, but in fact they do.

We begin to realize why the father-in-law experienced great joy when the Levite returned and the concubine did not. And in fact, there's a hint there.

[18 : 57] If we read between the lines, we begin to understand why it is maybe that she ran away from this Levite. Verses 27 and 28, he walks out, sees her at the door, acts as if nothing's happened, and just tells her, hey, it's time for us to get up.

And then as if she has not been violated enough, he desecrates her body and cuts her into 12 different pieces.

And if you're left speechless, that is the point. Verse 30 here sums it up. Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day.

God's people are worse than the pagans. Their cities, city of Gibeah, is more dangerous than Jebus.

There is no longer any distinction between the people that God has chosen and the nations around them. And that raises the question for us of what do we do with this story?

[20 : 27] Why is such a speechless event in the Bible? Why is Judges 21 chapters instead of 18 chapters?

This story, by the way, is going to continue in chapters 19 and 20. Some of it is a recurring theme that we've seen before in previous weeks.

There is something upside down about Israel. This man avoids a pagan city thinking Israel is safe. Instead, he ends up being warned about how dangerous the public square is.

Any Israelite should receive welcome and hospitality. In fact, not even any Israelite, any sojourner, any traveler should be welcomed in for safety, and yet the man who brings his own food can't even find a place to stay.

And men should be sacrificing themselves for women. They should not have women sacrificed for men.

[21 : 35] And so the theme of things being turned inside out in the book of Judges continues. Here in this chapter though, we take another step. There is a deeper point.

There's a greater heart issue at play here. There's a more sober warning. You may remember all the way back in chapter 17, we heard this phrase for the first time, in those days there was no king in Israel.

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. And how does this chapter start out? Chapter 19, verse 1, in those days when there was no king in Israel.

Which is meant to call up for us what we've already learned. And the author of Judges is telling us this. This is what happens when everyone does what is right in their own eyes.

You want to know what selfishness creates? You want to know what autonomy leads to? It doesn't lead to a little discomfort.

[22 : 52] It doesn't lead to a few bad moments. No, it leads to the worst moments. It doesn't make society a little dysfunctional.

No, it destroys society. It doesn't make things a little twisted. No, it breaks them. This is what happens, Israelites, when our time and our money and our sexuality and our politics are all about us.

It may not lead to that tomorrow. It may not lead there next week. It will lead there one day. There's an unveiling here.

Judges is telling us, look, this is what it really looks like. This is what you're really doing. This is where it leads. When everything is about me and mine.

When people do what is right in their own eyes, when they pursue their own interests above everything else, at the end of the day, people are destroyed and torn apart.

[24 : 18] torn apart and destroyed in metaphorical and psychological ways. They're destroyed and torn apart in physical ways.

Why is there no hospitality in this story? There's no hospitality because everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes. And what does hospitality take?

It takes sacrifice. It takes inconvenience. It takes resources. Why do the Levite and his guest, instead of facing these men head on, instead of sacrificing themselves, why do they offer the women in the story?

Because they're going to do what is right in their own eyes. They're going to do what's best for them, which is to maintain male dignity above everything else.

Why doesn't the Levite care about what has happened to his concubine? Because all the Levite cares about is what is right in his own eyes.

[25 : 36] It takes work to lay down your interests for the sake of someone else. It can hurt to actually care about what happens to people who are close to you.

Of course, the narrative hints but never states this is exactly why she ran back to her father's house. We can go even further back in the book of Judges.

This is not the first time we've heard the phrase of doing what's right in our eyes. Do you remember where we first saw it? The very beginning of the book of Samson. Remember, he pursues a pagan woman despite his parents' warnings.

Why? He tells them, get her for me. She is right in my eyes. And of course, we're not surprised then the way Samson's story plays out as he uses and abuses the people around him.

What happens when people do what's right in their own eyes? Well, Judges tells us, shows us who it is that gets to pay the bill.

[26 : 50] It's the most vulnerable who are most used and abused. Remember, all the way back to Jethpah, Jethpah wasn't sacrificed. His daughter was.

women pay more than men. Children pay more than adults. That's what's happening in our country right now in many ways.

And sojourners and travelers pay more than permanent residents and citizens. This is where it all ends.

This is where human selfishness leads. This is what rebellion against God creates. And Judges wants us to have no illusions.

This is how sin plays out in the world. In fact, the breakdown of hospitality and the violence that we see in this passage are two sides of the same coin.

[28 : 01] there's a reason these things go together because they actually have the same root at play. You cannot have a beautiful community and also demand what is most convenient for you.

human flourishing and autonomy and individualism cannot coexist.

exist. You can worship God or you can worship yourself. You can do what is right in your eyes or you can do what is right in God's eyes.

Remember what we talked about with Micah, Judges chapter 17 and 18. The worship of the true God is the only safe worship. you cannot have it both ways.

The extremes of this story reveal something for us that is also true about the normal everyday occurrences of selfishness in humanity.

[29 : 32] This is how ugly autonomy is. This is how gross and disgusting it is when we insist on our own way above all else.

This is where the human heart lives. This is how degrading and dehumanizing it all is. Not just for the world out there but for the church in here.

there is a reason that our main characters the last two stories have been Levites. And that is to remind us even the religious leaders were corrupt.

God's people do not get a pass as God examines the selfishness and the self-centeredness of this world. This is not something where they get to show and look at the world outside and say man isn't it really bad out there.

No judges is pushing the reader the Christian reader to say man and it's also bad in here. It may not be the same in degree it is the same in kind.

[30 : 47] Now you might say wow that sounds really extreme. Aren't you exaggerating a little bit right? This is an extreme story of course this is not what is happening in our lives our world day to day.

and I would submit to you that if that's what you think your eyes are not open. These extremes play out in our world day after day.

They play out in geopolitical situations that are happening right now. They play out day by day in a sex industry that pretends that things are legal and consensual.

they play out in less extreme ways every day in the indignities that we impose on others and we experience ourselves when we insist on what's right for us.

That our convenience is what matters more than anything else. Remember Judges is about the need for constant renewal and revival among God's people.

[31 : 52] It's about the need for a true and faithful king. A king who can do what no human can do which is to change the hearts of men. Look with me on page 10 of your worship guide.

It says this, from the Garden of Eden humanity's fundamental rebellion against God has been a rebellion of autonomy. Adam and Eve were given a clear law and chose to become a law unto themselves.

The history of humanity has followed this example. And so once again Judges pushes us, reminds us, shows us how extreme the problem is so that we understand how powerful the solution must be.

There is only one way out. There is only one solution to the selfishness and self-centeredness of the world, not only the world out there, but the world in here.

The opposite of doing what's right in your own eyes is following and trusting and obeying Jesus as king.

[33 : 09] remember, there are only two choices. We talked about this in the gospel of Mark, Mark chapter 8. Jesus says, who do you say that I am? Am I the king or not?

There are two ways that you can take this. You can follow and obey me. You can do what's right in your own eyes. One will end in joy, the other ends in tragedy.

There's only one power strong enough to save the world from itself. We see in Judges chapter 19 that the powerful sacrifice the weak.

When Jesus, the true king, comes, we see the powerful being sacrificed for the weak. That's the hope of Israel in this passage.

Verse 1, there was no king in Israel. Things will not change until there's the true king in Israel.

Things will not change until there is one strong enough to save the world from itself.

[34 : 26] So what do we do? We bow before the true king who never did what was right in his own eyes. We choose him and his ways over our own individualism and autonomy.

We trust in him. We wait for him. We hope for him. We've never had a communion hymn before.

That's a hymn of lament. But we're going to do it today.

You can look on verse 11 of your worship guide. This is a song grieving the brokenness of the world and looking forward to what is to come. And what does it tell us? There's a table coming where the poor are not going to be marginalized and sacrificed for the sake of the powerful.

No, the poor are honored guests. The weary wanderers are not going to have to worry about what's going to happen in the square of the city. No, they're going to come in and find rest.

People are not going to be seeking what's right in their own eyes. No, they're going to have a chorus where all voices join as one in songs of celebration that all our wars are done.

[35 : 37] They have told us of a city where all death will be undone and all our tearful mourning gives way to healing song. That's our hope and that's our only hope and it is true because of Jesus.

Let's pray. our father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you that your word challenges us, it clarifies things for us and gives us great hope.

We ask that you would remind us of both things. You'd remind us of the darkness and brokenness of the world and our own role and complicity in it. You'd also remind us of the great hope that we have in Jesus Christ, the one who did not do what was right in his own eyes, but came to redeem and save and rescue his people.

We ask that our hope and our trust would be in him above all else and we ask these things in his name. Amen.